

Reflection
Departure for Church Ceremony
22 December 2023
Barbara Phelan, pbvm
24 January 1942 - 18 December 2023

By
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NL Province Leader

When I reflected on my experience of knowing Barbara for over 60 years, I think I name what I feel is Barbara's essence when I say she was a grateful woman.

So today, we praise and thank God for the people, places and events that have reflected God's love to Barbara over these long years.

Count them, my spirit, and be grateful.
Count the wonders one by one,
the laughter and the tears,
the companionship and the loneliness,
the high tides and the low ebbs.
Anne Johnson
Myriam of Jerusalem

Looking back to Barbara's birth in St. John's on 24 January 1942 to her parents, Herbert and Mary (Chapman) Phelan, we know that her parents were grateful for her birth and this attitude of gratitude stayed with Barbara throughout her lifetime.

Barbara entered our community on 12 September 1962, made first profession to the vowed life in 1965, receiving the name, Sister Mary Herbert, in honor of her father, and she made final profession on 28 June 1970. Barbara was called home to God on 18 December.

Barbara was a primary teacher par excellence and brought her talents to Benoit's Cove, Cape St. George, Harbour Breton, Harbour Main, Port au Port, St. Alban's, St. John's, Torbay, Windsor and Witless Bay, a veritable map of the island of Newfoundland. Having ministered myself later in some of these places, I know the impact Barbara had on so many lives.

She also was a wonderful storyteller who saw the fun in ordinary things. She relates a humorous anecdote from her Grade 2 class in Harbour Main. Back in 1978 when her sister, Geraldine, was home for a visit, Barbara invited her to come to her classroom to meet her students. Barbara asked the children which one looked the oldest. One little boy looked up at us and said, "if you use Oil of Olay, it's hard to say."

After her teaching career, Barbara served as receptionist at the Generalate. Sharon Fagan currently living in Ireland speaks of *"Barbara's warm heart and space for others in her life...she shared her kindness with others in quiet and gentle ways, some of which we may never know."* Lois also in Ireland wrote about her generous service and great organizational skills as leader of our beautiful Motherhouse choir. Nothing was ever too much trouble for Barbara. Sherryl White, a Sister of St. Joseph, who works with our community, described Barbara to a tee: *"I always found Barbara to be quiet, circumspect and one who kept confidences as a sacrosanct challenge, knowing, always willing to help but never overstepping. Would that we all could be as humble and discreet!"*

Barbara suffered a lot of pain and suffering in her lifetime. An adaptation of a poem by Doris Peel about the splendour of the human person fits the Barbara who was released from the shackles of emotional turmoil and who exclaimed much like Mary's Magnificat:

*"Daily I am God's delight,
Daily God rejoices in God's handiwork,
All fresh, all bright
All wrought from eternal light...
To be what God beholds as ME.
God's poem, God's psalm
In sight of him
How fashioned of gladness I must be!"*

Marilyn Doyle, Mary Theresa Doyle and Mabel Whelan held Barbara in high esteem as a member of their entrance group. When they celebrated their 50th Anniversary in 2015 they used these words by Bruce Sanguin for their Closing Prayer and again, it has words of gratitude:

*We gather to give thanks for the stillness that renews
and for the striving that drives us onward;
and the blessed unrest that fashions new futures.
We give thanks for the whole of it.
It is held together by the one we call the Christ
that the peace and the struggle of our lives
was not in vain but is an offering of love
to this unfolding story of the universe
that we are telling with our lives.*

Barbara, we give thanks for the whole of your life and are honored to have known you.

Rest in God's peace. Amen.